

HOMELESS GRANT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (HGAP) 2008 PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

Snohomish County – Project Anchor

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CONTEXT

Snohomish County has a long history of planning and advocacy for housing and homelessness issues, and there have been several major planning activities in the past four years. In January 2006, the Homeless Policy Task Force released the Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness, titled *Everyone at Home Now*, which included a countywide emphasis on increased prevention services and the development of new housing with support services for homeless individuals and families.

In early 2007, the Snohomish County Office of Housing, Homelessness, and Community Development (OHHCD) worked with local stakeholders to develop an Affordable Housing Production Plan (AHPP) with strategies for creating more housing opportunities countywide using existing resources. The Housing Consortium of Everett and Snohomish County developed a companion plan, *Housing within Reach*, in 2008 that builds on the AHPP and recommends additional strategies to serve more low-income and homeless households over the next ten years. Both the AHPP and the *Housing within Reach* plan recognized the importance and cost-effectiveness of preventing homelessness and keeping people in their homes with short-term assistance.*

PROJECT HISTORY

Snohomish County OHHCD applied for HGAP funding in the spring 2008 round, and was successfully awarded funding in June 2008 for Project Anchor. The goal of Anchor is to provide a range of prevention services tailored to the needs of families at risk of homelessness. The recent planning work in the county showed the cost-effectiveness of and high level of need for homelessness prevention services, and OHHCD designed Anchor as a pilot program to dramatically increase prevention efforts countywide. Anchor also includes a component focusing on individuals discharging from institutions, which was another priority population for the Ten-Year Plan, but was cut from Project Ladder (the 2006 HGAP program) for budget reasons.

* Note: for more information on Snohomish County's first HGAP project in 2006, please see the 2006 Project History, available on the HGAP website: <http://www.cted.wa.gov/site/1036/default.aspx>.

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Eligible clients for Anchor are individuals at imminent risk of eviction or homelessness (such as households receiving three-day pay-or-vacate notices) with incomes below 50 percent of Area Median Income. After their initial intake and assessment, Anchor participants will receive one of three tiers of assistance, depending on their situation.

Tier 1

Tier 1 clients already have housing at intake, and receive prevention services to assist in stabilizing and maintaining their current housing. Clients receive one to three months of rent assistance, and may receive eviction prevention legal assistance, financial literacy education, and/or may opt to enroll in a renter certification program. These clients have a long history of permanent housing and employment and may have never accessed services before. Low-level telephone case management is available for clients to help them move toward housing stability.

Tier 2

For clients requiring a higher level of assistance, Anchor provides between three and 12 months of housing assistance, medium-level case management, financial literacy education, and renter certification. These clients may have had intermittent housing or employment inconsistency and need greater assistance to become self-sufficient.

Tier 3

Unlike Tiers 1 and 2, clients in Tier 3 are individuals discharged from institutions (such as jails or hospitals) who would otherwise be discharged into homelessness, and likely need longer-term housing assistance. Anchor provides up to three years of permanent rental assistance, while ongoing intensive case management connects clients to the support services they need to address mental health, chemical dependency, or other issues that could interfere with housing stability. Tier 3 clients receive help applying for Section 8, and will transfer to mainstream assistance at the completion of their Anchor participation.

CURRENT ACTIVITY

The County finalized its contract with Washington State Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED) in November 2008. The County released an RFQ to select the subcontractor for both Tiers 1 and 2, and for Tier 3 in December 2008, and selected the subcontractors in January 2009. The OHHCD project coordinator began client intakes in February 2009. Project Anchor will transition in March to using the 2-1-1 service for client referrals to Project Anchor intake staff, as soon as the subcontractors are fully staffed (2-1-1 does not conduct the screening and intake process).

HOMELESS GRANT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (HGAP) 2008 PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

The first activities carried out by the project coordinator at OHHCD were to develop scoring criteria for referrals to Anchor, and to modify the self-sufficiency criteria used to track progress for Anchor clients. OHHCD was able to build on existing tools, as well as advice from fellow HGAP grantee Serenity House in Clallam County. Serenity House recommended that employment history and rental history were the two most important indicators of whether short-term assistance will help a family return to housing stability and self-sufficiency, and help determine what Tier of assistance is required for each family.

The HGAP project coordinator was also able to build on existing landlord relationships that she developed through Project Ladder. Landlords have been very responsive to the program, even offering discounted rents for multiple clients, or “Costco pricing.” The HGAP project coordinator at OHHCD serves as the liaison between property managers and service providers. During landlord recruitment, she gives landlords her contact information to encourage them to contact her with any issues, as well as a copy of the Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness. Several landlords have become engaged in broader homelessness issues in the community because of their positive experiences. One systems-change goal of Anchor is to encourage landlords to give delinquent tenants information about prevention services at the same time they issue 3-day pay-or-vacate notices, so that tenants can remain in their housing.

Project Anchor has enrolled about ten clients as of early March 2009, and expects to ramp up intakes in late March when the subcontractor is fully staffed and entry-level training occurs. Initial referrals came primarily through community agencies that heard about the program, and through health district staff referring pregnant women in need of short-term assistance. The intake system going forward will funnel through the 2-1-1 system, which will refer possible clients to subcontractor Volunteers of America (VOA). VOA Project Anchor staff will assess these referrals, determine the appropriate Tier, and enroll the clients. Catholic Community Services manages Tier 3, rapid re-housing of clients being discharged from institutions into homelessness.

OUTCOMES AND PROGRESS

Project Anchor is in its early stages, but there is one important lesson from both Anchor and Ladder that will help Snohomish County as it develops future prevention programs. The successful recruitment and retention of landlords demonstrate the importance of having a trusted liaison for property managers and of communication and education for landlords.

There have been some early challenges for Anchor as it rolls out. The initial budget hoped that the subcontracting agencies would be able to find some match funding for administration and services, but that has not been possible in the current economy and

HOMELESS GRANT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (HGAP) 2008 PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

budget landscape. Another challenge has been introducing a new model of service delivery to the region, in which not all clients receive intensive case management, but some (Tier 1) are given information on resources and encouraged to become self-sufficient more quickly. This model has been successful in other places, and Snohomish County is trying it for the first time on such a scale for at-risk or homeless households.

Anchor will provide many important lessons for the providers in the county on the efficacy and outcomes of prevention services, and its budget includes an evaluation of what happens to clients after they leave the program. OHHCD will mail clients a survey six months after their exit from the program, with the incentive that they will receive a \$25 gift card if they return the completed survey. Clients will also be tracked by the HMIS system.

PROJECT TIMELINE

2005	State Homelessness Housing and Assistance Act (2163) passed
January 2006	Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness is released
December 2006	Snohomish County is successfully awarded HGAP funding for Project Ladder (rental assistance + support services)
January 2008	HGAP releases 2008 HGAP RFP
April 2008	Snohomish County submits HGAP application for Project Anchor
June 2008	Snohomish County Project Anchor is successfully awarded HGAP funding
November 2008	HGAP contract start
January 2009	Subcontractors selected
February 2009	Client intakes begun